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Processing back online at Savannah River Site facility

[The Augusta Chronicle](#)

August 27, 2016

Savannah River Site has restarted a process in its H Canyon facility that will allow uranium from spent nuclear fuel currently stored there to be shipped out of South Carolina.

The site has restarted the first cycle unit in H Canyon for the first time in more than five years, according to the Department of Energy. In this process, uranium from spent nuclear fuel is separated from aluminum, fission products and other impurities.

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This is the fourth of five unit operations to restart since 2013, allowing SRS to process 1,000 bundles of spent nuclear fuel and 200 high-flux isotope reactor cores.

The last operation waiting to be restarted is blend down to low enriched uranium, according to the agency. That process is estimated to restart within two years, said Patrick McGuire, the DOE's assistant manager for nuclear material stabilization.

"After blend down, the (uranium) will be shipped to a Tennessee Valley Authority vendor for the manufacture of reactor fuel to be used for the production of commercial nuclear power," McGuire said. "The last shipment made to the vendor was in November 2011."

As more material is shipped, more spent fuel stored at SRS will be able to be processed and shipped out, McGuire said.

In the blend-down process, highly enriched uranium recovered from bundles of spent fuel rods from foreign and domestic research reactors is mixed with natural uranium to make low enriched uranium.

"Disposition of the approximately 1,000 bundles and up to 200 (high-flux isotope reactor) cores is expected to be completed in 2024, which would potentially allow DOE to authorize more missions for H Canyon," McGuire said.

H Canyon is the only operating, production-scale, radiologically shielded chemical separations facility in the country. Originally constructed to produce nuclear materials for the nation's weapons programs, its mission changed after the Cold War into one of helping to dispose of and stabilize nuclear materials and spent nuclear fuel from legacy cleanup and from research reactors.

CH2M Hill adds 300 employees, takes on more Hanford work

[Tri-City Herald](#)

August 28, 2016

About 300 Hanford workers become employees of CH2M Hill Plateau Remediation Co. or its subcontractors Aug. 29.

After 11 years, Hanford Washington Closure is wrapping up its contract at the Hanford nuclear reservation at the end of September and has done its last work in the field.

At its peak in 2012, with the help of economic stimulus money from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, Washington Closure employed about 1,200 workers. On Aug. 29, its work force drops to just fewer than 100.

The number of employees is expected to decline through September to about 30 people, who will remain for several months in a contract closeout office working on audits, documenting completed projects and finishing up other paperwork.

All but about a dozen employees not joining the closeout office have other Hanford jobs lined up or plan to retire, with the last dozen still looking for work, said Peter Bengtson of Washington Closure.

Washington Closure has known since its contract was awarded that its goal was to complete most cleanup of Hanford in 220 square miles along the Columbia River, an area called the river corridor.

Unlike other Hanford cleanup contracts, the contract was awarded as a “closure” contract, with the intention of closing out work rather than awarding a new contract to continue the cleanup as the contract expired.

As many river corridor projects have been completed and work has ramped down in the past three years, Washington Closure has helped place 94 percent of departing workers in other jobs at Hanford or elsewhere, Bengtson said.

The contract would have ended in September 2015, but a one-year extension was added to the original 10-year term to continue work on two particularly challenging projects.

One of those, the 324 Building and the highly radioactive spill discovered beneath it, was transferred to CH2M Hill in the spring.

The other, remaining environmental cleanup of the high-hazard 618-10 Burial Ground, transfers to CH2M Hill Aug. 29.

CH2M Hill also takes over operation of the huge, lined landfill in central Hanford for low-activity radioactive waste and hazardous chemical waste — the Environmental Restoration Disposal Facility — which Washington Closure has operated for use by any Hanford cleanup contractor.

Washington Closure's original \$1.8 billion contract grew to about \$3 billion. The increase included about \$400 million of additional work added to the contract by the Department of Energy and about \$600 million in work as some projects turned out to be far larger or more challenging than anticipated.

For example, DOE had Washington Closure chase some chromium contamination down to groundwater 85 feet deep, not far from the Columbia River. Holes were so large they had to be engineered like open-pit mines.

But the deep dig to remove contaminated soil protected Columbia River water from a form of chromium that can cause cancer in humans and is particularly toxic to fish, including spawning salmon.

Washington Closure says it completed its work \$320 million below estimated costs, allowing that money to be used for additional environmental cleanup work.

Among work it completed was cleaning up 614 waste sites, tearing down 324 buildings (some of them heavily contaminated), hauling 11.6 million tons of debris and contaminated soil to the central Hanford landfill, and “cocooning” two Hanford production reactors.

Hanford’s production reactors are torn down to little more than their radioactive core, sealed up and reroofed to allow radiation to decay over 70 years to more manageable levels.

It completed the work with one of the best safety records in the DOE complex, Bengtson said. It has not had an accident that caused a lost day of work due to injury for more than three and a half years, despite the stress of employees who knew they were working themselves out of a job.

“We’re giving PRC (CH2M Hill Plateau Remediation Co.) some great workers who performed really well,” Bengtson said.

CH2M Hill, which employed about 1,400 workers before Aug. 29, will hire about 87 Hanford Atomic Metal Trades Council workers and about 58 nonunion workers. About 65 building trades workers from Washington Closure will be hired by a CH2M Hill subcontractor.

In addition, about 90 Washington Closure subcontractor workers will be hired for CH2M Hill projects, include those working at the Environmental Restoration Disposal Facility.

Some landfill workers had been laid off several months ago, as Washington Closure wrapped up some of its cleanup work and the volume of material sent to the landfill dropped.

CH2M Hill is Hanford's central plateau contractor, responsible for central Hanford cleanup — other than Hanford's underground waste storage tanks — and for groundwater cleanup across the site. It also is responsible for Hanford's K Reactors, where work is planned to remove highly radioactive sludge from storage near the Columbia River.

“CH2M appreciates the confidence DOE has in our ability to complete the remaining River Corridor Closure Contract scope,” CH2M Hill said in a statement.

CH2M Hill is reviewing the plan developed for the 324 Building, including the spill beneath it. Some 21 Washington Closure workers on that project joined CH2M Hill in April.

At the 618-10 Burial Ground, Washington Closure recently finished demolishing 80 vertically buried pipes filled with research waste, some of it highly radioactive, and loaded out the waste from about 32 of the buried pipe units.

CH2M Hill will demolish 14 of the vertically buried pipes left for last because they were made of thick-walled steel and load out the remainder of the waste from the pipes. It will be responsible for excavating any remaining debris buried in trenches close to the pipes and then backfilling and replanting the 618-10 Burial Ground, which is six miles north of Richland.

“We would like to congratulate Washington Closure Hanford on its successful execution of river corridor cleanup, which significantly advance Hanford's mission,” CH2M Hill said.

Uranium processing facility breaks ground in Oak Ridge

[Local 8 Now](#)

August 25, 2016

OAK RIDGE, Tenn. (WVLT)-- Project managers and congressional leaders were on hand this morning for the groundbreaking of a uranium processing facility (UPF) support building at the Y-12 Security Complex in Oak Ridge.

When it is completed, the support building will be the first permanent structure on the UPF Project and the first building at Y-12 with a LEED Gold Certification. The three-story structure will provide office space as well as a warehouse and construction craft break areas. It will replace the need for large group temporary trailers usually associated with large construction projects.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is managing construction of the building for the UPF Project Office.

Using a "build to budget" strategy the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) has committed to Congress to provide these facilities by 2025 for no more than \$6.5 billion. As one of the largest construction projects in Tennessee history, UPF will have a significant impact on local and state economies.

Concessions specialist named to lead Manhattan Project National Park

[Tri-City Herald](#)

August 24, 2016

The concessions chief at Yosemite National Park in California has been named the permanent superintendent of the Manhattan Project National Historical Park, which includes Hanford's historic B Reactor.

Kris Kirby is expected to start her assignment with the new park in mid-October. She will be the first permanent employee of the park, which officially opened in November.

"Kris brings park experience from her work at Yosemite National Park, Glen Canyon National Recreation Area and the Lake Mead National Recreation

Area to the equation, as well as business savvy and strong relationship skills,” said Sue Masica, the director of the National Park Service’s Intermountain Region, in a statement.

Masica recently introduced Kirby as the new superintendent at a meeting of the Energy Communities Alliance in Lakewood, Colo.

A Colorado native, Kirby will be based in Lakewood, overseeing the new national park operations in three states from there. The park includes historic areas at Hanford, Oak Ridge, Tenn., and Los Alamos, N.M., where work was done during World War II to create the world’s first atomic weapons.

Park service officials have previously said that within a year or two, each of the three sites of the park could have site managers.

The park now has an interim superintendent, Charles Strickfaden, who is also the superintendent of Fort Union National Monument in New Mexico. He recently replaced Tracy Atkins, who is based at the Denver Service Center.

Kirby will be supported by dozens of park service staff across the country, including Atkins and Strickfaden.

She is familiar with the Mid-Columbia, after serving for a time in 2012 as the acting superintendent at the Whitman Mission National Historic Site in Walla Walla.

To tour B Reactor or other historic areas of Hanford included in the new national park, call 509-376-1647.

ISU researcher to study reactor metals

[Post Register](#)

August 27, 2016

An Idaho State University researcher and three collaborators from Idaho National Laboratory have received a \$500,000 grant to improve metals used inside nuclear reactors, the university announced Thursday.

Haiming Wen, an ISU assistant professor who also works for the lab, will team up with three other INL scientists on the project: James Cole, Isabella Van Rooyen and Yongfeng Zhang. Their goal is to improve the performance of metals to be able to withstand high amounts of radiation.

“Basically, we are trying to help develop advanced nuclear reactors and to extend the life of currently used nuclear reactors,” Wen said in an ISU news release. “We are trying to develop materials with improved performance and irradiation resistance and to assess the use of these materials in nuclear reactors.”

With the grant from the U.S. Department of Energy’s Office of Nuclear Energy, the researchers hope to develop “nanostructures” within the metals that could improve their performance over conventional reactor materials.

“We will be producing this nanomaterial using advanced manufacturing techniques,” Wen said. “This work focuses on assessing the performance of these materials in a real nuclear irradiation environment. This has never been done before.”

Starting in October, Wen and a graduate student will begin conducting experiments. The INL scientists will help out with computer simulations, and the DOE will provide assistance with neutron irradiation testing to see how the metals perform.

“In the whole world there are only a few places you can perform neutron irradiation testing of materials, and the most important one is the Advanced Test Reactor at the INL,” Wen said. “It is very exciting to get this opportunity for neutron irradiation.”

The \$500,000 covers research and development. Accessing and conducting tests at ATR and other lab facilities is worth another \$2.4 million.

NNSA picks Lockheed Subsidiary for \$5B follow-on Nevada Natl Security Site operations contract

[GovCon Wire](#)

August 26, 2016

A subsidiary of Lockheed Martin (NYSE: LMT) has won a potential 10-year, \$5 billion contract to help the National Nuclear Security Administration manage and operate the Nevada National Security Site.

NNSA said Friday it chose Lockheed subsidiary Nevada Site Science Support and Technologies Corp.'s proposal for the follow-on NNSS M&O contract through a full and open competition using a "best value" evaluation method.

NVS3T will collaborate with Fluor's federal services business and Longenecker and Associates to run the site, the agency noted.

The 1,360-square mile facility conducts high-hazard nuclear operations, testing and training programs for NNSA, the Defense Department and other U.S. government agencies.

NNSS' incumbent contractor National Security Technologies LLC is scheduled to complete work at the site Sept. 30.

Las Vegas-based NSTec is a joint venture between Northrop Grumman (NYSE: NOC), AECOM (NYSE: ACM), CH2M and Nuclear Fuel Services.

The follow-on award contains a four-month transition period to help NNSA transfer site management responsibilities to NVS3T.

At San Onofre, spent nuclear fuel is getting special tomb

[The Orange County Register](#)

August 29, 2016

Waves crash on the rocks below San Onofre's tsunami wall, but it's the only sound.

The pipes that roared when they sucked in 1.8 billion gallons of ocean water a day – pipes as wide as a Cadillac Coupe de Ville is long – are silent. The catch pools that once teemed with fish are still and dark. A cage for errant sea lions rests in a far corner, empty.

"They'd chase the fish in here," Jim Madigan said of the sea lions and the catch pools.

"We'd put them in the crates and take them to Laguna Beach to be checked out and returned to the ocean," added Madigan, who has worked at San Onofre Nuclear Generating Station in one capacity or another for 35 years.

"There was more than one repeat visitor."

Once, San Onofre was a marvel of modern engineering – splitting atoms to create heat, boiling water to spin turbines and creating electricity that fulfilled 18 percent of Southern California's demand. Now, it's a demolition project of mind-boggling proportions, overseen by a dozen government agencies.

It's expected to cost \$4.4 billion, take 20 years and leave millions of pounds of spent nuclear fuel on the scenic bluff beside the blue Pacific until 2049 or so, because the federal government has dithered for generations on finding a permanent repository.

In this vacuum, contractors from Holtec International – one of only a handful of companies licensed by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to do dry-cask

radiation storage in the U.S. – are at work. Construction of the controversial “concrete monolith” to protect San Onofre’s stranded waste has begun, over the protests of critics who decry a “beachfront nuclear waste dump.”

THE MONOLITH

The reinforced concrete pad that will support the monolith is finished.

Last week, Holtec workers used cranes and trucks to maneuver the first of 75 giant tubes into place atop it. When those tubes are bolted in, concrete will be poured up to their necks, and they’ll be topped off with a 24,000-pound steel-and-concrete lid. Earth will be piled around it so that it looks something like an underground bunker.

Southern California Edison, which operates the plant, would not share the Holtec contract or reveal its price tag, but San Onofre’s owners have recovered more than \$300 million from the federal government for its failure to dispose of nuclear waste, which is why dry-cask storage must be built in the first place. San Onofre’s decommissioning plan sets aside \$1.27 billion for future spent fuel management.

This is one of the first newly licensed Hi-Storm Umax dry-cask storage systems Holtec is building in the United States. Once it’s complete – expected to be late next year – workers will begin the deliberate and delicate dance of removing all spent fuel from cooling pools beside each reactor.

The iconic twin domes you see from the highway and the beach don’t reveal their enormity. They stand as tall as a 13-story building, and the adjacent pools holding their spent fuel are 25 feet wide, 60 feet long, about 40 to 50 feet deep and hold a half-million gallons of water.

When Southern California Edison begins removing the 2,668 fuel assemblies chilling there, bays to those enormous pools will open. Holtec storage canisters will be lowered in. Underwater, 37 spent fuel assemblies will be

loaded into each canister and capped. The canister will be slipped into a “transfer cask,” lifted from the pool and drained.

Then it will be loaded onto a truck, driven a few hundred yards to the Umax and lowered into one of those 75 tubes. The waste-filled canister will remain inside. The transfer cask will be removed. The tube will be capped.

This will be repeated more than 70 times, until all the fuel in the more vulnerable pools is entombed in more stable dry-cask storage. That’s slated to be done by mid-2019.

TECHNOLOGY

The system will become something of a real-time experiment: Edison is partnering with the Electric Power Research Institute to develop inspection techniques to monitor the casks as they age. The casks’ integrity over time, while holding hotter “high burn-up” fuel, is a major concern of critics.

“Burn-up” – i.e., the amount of uranium that undergoes fission – has increased over time, allowing utilities to suck more power out of nuclear fuel before replacing it, federal regulators say. It first came into wide use in America in the latter part of the last century, and how it will behave in short-term storage containers (which, pending changes in U.S. policy on nuclear cleanup, must be used for longer-term storage) remains a topic of debate.

Tom Palmisano, chief nuclear officer at Edison and vice president for decommissioning, leans over a picture on a computer screen.

The image is a cut-away of a storage cask, and inside the cask’s ventilation ducts is a tiny, motorized camera. One version of the robot can attach to metal surfaces via magnets; another can attach to nonmetal surfaces via suction.

“The tooling to go inside and inspect these things is being developed – it’s an industrywide effort,” Palmisano said. “We’ve got visual inspection capability, and we’re working on other quantifiable inspection capabilities.”

But dry-cask technology is not new, he said. Nuclear power plants in the U.S. have used it since 1986, and an analysis by the Electric Power Research Institute found that it would take at least 80 years before a severe crack could form in a dry storage canister.

The Umax uses the most corrosion-resistant grade of stainless steel; its design exceeds California earthquake requirements, and it protects against hazards such as water, fire or tsunamis.

Critics cast skeptical eyes on those claims.

They don't disagree that dry storage is safer than the spent fuel pools, but activist Donna Gilmore says officials gloss over the potential for serious cracking – a bigger risk in a moist, salty, oceanfront environment such as San Onofre.

Once a crack starts, it would continue to grow through the wall of the canister, undetected, until it leaked radiation, Gilmore said.

Other countries use thicker-walled casks than those licensed in America, and she believes we should, too.

EYES FORWARD

What everyone wants is to remove the ensconced “stranded waste” from San Onofre as soon as possible, and the only way that can happen is if the federal government takes action.

Palmisano said energy is best expended pushing that forward, not arguing over canisters.

On that front, he is cautiously optimistic.

In January, the U.S. Department of Energy launched a new push to create temporary nuclear waste storage sites in regions eager for the business, currently in West Texas and New Mexico. Several of those could be up and running while the prickly question of coming up with a permanent site is hashed out.

There could be a plan, and a place, for this waste within the next 10 years, Palmisano said – but that would require congressional action, which in turn would likely require much prodding from the public.

“We are frustrated and, frankly, outraged by the federal government’s failure to perform,” he said. “I have fuel I can ship today, and throughout the next 15 years. Give me a ZIP code and I’ll get it there.”

END TIMES

San Onofre’s heavily protected control room was built in an airtight envelope so that nothing outside would affect the people running the reactors. It once glowed with a dizzying array of lights and screens and switches. Now, it’s mostly dark.

The containment domes that protected the reactors are patched where holes were made to install enormous new – some say souped-up – steam generators that were the plant’s undoing. Labyrinths of metal, seven stories high – which once pulsed as high-pressure pipes funneled steam heated to 1,000 degrees – are now cold.

Diablo Canyon, the state’s only other nuclear plant, is slated to close in 2025. An era has come to an end in California.

“Whether you’re for or against nuclear power, it’s really a shame for investors and ratepayers and employees that this facility had to be shut down prematurely,” Palmisano said.

“It was a very viable facility.”

DOE asks judge to dismiss state's Hanford chemical vapor lawsuit

[Tri-City Herald](#)

August 24, 2016

The Department of Energy is asking that a federal judge dismiss the state of Washington's lawsuit seeking increased protection from chemical vapors for Hanford workers.

The state is overstepping its authority and has no legal standing to bring the case against the federal government, the Department of Justice argued on behalf of DOE in a motion filed this week in federal court.

"We will, of course, strenuously oppose this motion, and we expect to prevail," Bob Ferguson, Washington state attorney general, said in a statement.

The filing does not seek to dismiss a similar lawsuit filed by Hanford Challenge and union Local 598 against DOE and its tank farm contractor, Washington River Protection Solutions. The cases have been consolidated.

During spring and summer, about 57 Hanford workers have received medical evaluations for possible exposure to chemical vapors. They are concerned that exposure to the chemicals could cause serious lung and neurological illnesses.

The Department of Justice legal filing says the state has no standing in the case under two possible legal avenues.

First, the state faces no direct harm from chemical vapors associated with waste in underground tanks at the Hanford nuclear reservation, such as environmental harm to land or water, according to the Department of Justice.

Second, the state cannot sue the federal government to protect the welfare of its residents because the federal government has a superior claim to represent the general rights and welfare of its citizens, the Department of Justice said.

In addition, other courts have found that the state may not bring a lawsuit to vindicate the interest of a narrow subset of its citizens, the Department of Justice said.

“The very small subset of the state’s population working at Hanford may themselves file suit if they believe they have a basis to do so,” the Department of Justice said. “Indeed, Hanford Challenge and the United Association of Plumbers and Steamfitters Local Union 598 have filed suit.”

The federal government is questioning the state’s ability to bring a lawsuit nearly a year after it was filed, Ferguson pointed out.

“I suggest the federal government focus on protecting workers rather than continuing to evade accountability,” he said.

At the start of the month, U.S. Judge Thomas Rice ordered DOE and its tank farm contractor to take steps to protect workers until he rules on immediate protections requested by plaintiffs in a motion for preliminary injunction filed in July. DOE had offered to take the steps in exchange for more time to prepare arguments and retain expert witnesses in response to the preliminary injunction motion.

Steps include continuing to use supplied air respirators within all Hanford tank farms, a step it took in response to demands made in June by the Hanford Atomic Metal Trades Council, an organization of Hanford unions.

DOE also is not doing any work in the tank farms that disturbs waste, unless needed for safety reasons. Disturbing waste increases the possibility that chemical vapors could be released.

The judge has set a hearing on the motion for preliminary injunction for Oct. 12 in Spokane. A non-jury trial is scheduled for September 2017.

FCA Suit over \$4.5B cleanup moves forward after Escobar

[Law 360](#)

August 25, 2016

New York (August 25, 2016, 4:15 PM ET) -- A Washington federal judge on Thursday lifted a stay in a False Claims Act suit filed by a trucking company that claims a prime contractor breached its \$4.5 billion contract with the government for cleanup of a decommissioned nuclear site, letting the case proceed after the parties sought clarity from the U.S. Supreme Court's Escobar decision.

Hazardous waste transportation company Savage Logistics LLC and prime contractor CH2M Hill Plateau Remediation Co. asked for a stay in the case in April until the U.S. Supreme Court ruled on Universal Health Services Inc. v. Escobar, another FCA case that the sides said could significantly change the course of their case.

Both sides filed to have the stay lifted after the Escobar decision came down in June, with the high court ruling that corporations can face FCA liability if they bill the federal government while out of compliance with regulations that aren't explicit conditions of the payment.

In a brief order granting the request Thursday, U.S. District Judge Salvador Mendoza Jr. said the sides can renew or note any of their previous motions and told them to file a proposed scheduling order by Sept. 5.

Savage alleges that CHPRC breached its \$4.5 billion contract with the U.S. Department of Energy for cleanup of the Hanford, Washington, nuclear site by faking the size of its subcontractors.

The DOE in 2008 named CHPRC as the prime contractor for the environmental cleanup of portions of the Hanford site. The decision required CHPRC to set aside a percentage of jobs for small and disadvantaged business, such as Savage, according to court documents.

Savage accused CHPRC of knowingly not following the DOE's small-business rules and of conspiring with one of its larger subcontractors, FE&C, by awarding jobs to small companies they created to serve as facades for FE&C while FE&C did the work. Savage also accused CHPRC of using the allegedly fake small businesses to avoid paying federal penalties for breaching a contract.

The parties wanted to stay the suit until the Escobar decision because it reviewed similar FCA liability issues central to the Hanford suit, namely the validity of the "implied certification" theory, which holds that companies implicitly certify compliance with regulations when seeking payment from the government and may commit fraud if they're actually out of compliance.

The court's unanimous decision preserved that potent theory, saying that violated regulations don't have to be explicit conditions of payment to trigger liability.

Counsel for CHPRC said in April they expected the Supreme Court would eliminate the theory, or at least limit its application. A CHPRC spokeswoman on Thursday said the company does not comment on pending litigation.

Savage's attorney, Bruce Paul Babbitt, said that with Judge Mendoza's order, the case stands where it was before the Supreme Court ruling and that a new scheduling plan will likely be the next step.

CHPRC is represented by Marisa M. Bavand, Allison L. Murphy and Richard F. Shordt of Groff Murphy Trachtenberg & Everard PLLC.

Savage is represented by Bruce Paul Babbitt of Jameson Babbitt Stites & Lombard PLLC.

The case is U.S. ex rel. Savage et al. v. CH2M Plateau Remediation Co. et al., case number 4:14-cv-05002, in the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Washington.